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SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR. JOINT
STAFF FOR LTGEN SELVA

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SUBJECT: ATERET COHANIM TAKES OVER PALESTINIAN HOME IN
MUSLIM QUARTER OF OLD CITY

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Ateret Cohanim members took over an Old City residence early April 2, claiming they had bought the property, according to Jerusalem lawyer Danny Siedemann. The Palestinian resident Naser Jaber disputed this claim, saying he won a court case challenging his ownership several years ago, and will present his case to the court again on April 5. The director of Israeli NGO "Israel Committee Against House Demolitions" opined that the settlers deliberately timed their take over for the day Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman took office. End summary.

Ateret Cohanim Settlers Take Over Old City Home

12. (C) Jerusalem lawyer Danny Siedemann told Poloff that a group of Ateret Cohanim members took over the Old City residence of Naser Jaber on April 2. According to Siedemann, the settlers claimed they had purchased the residence, but Jaber declared that his family of eight had vacated it only for renovations. Siedemann said he is following up on information that the Israel Land Authority may be involved, and confirmed that Jaber won a court case several years earlier challenging his ownership of the residence. Siedemann said Jaber re-submitted his case on April 2, and will present his ownership documents to the court on April 5. Siedemann dismissed media reports that a scuffle took place between Jaber and the settlers, saying Jaber was not at home when the settlers arrived.

13. (C) NGO "Israel Committee Against House Demolitions" director Jeff Halper opined to Poloff on April 3 that Ateret Cohanim intentionally took over the residence on the same day that Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman took office, to set a precedent and gauge international reaction. Halper asserted that Lieberman or his staff may have given the green light for the settlers' actions.

14. (C) Note. According to Seidemann, Ateret Cohanim received over one million U.S. dollars in 2006 from a tax-exempt 501(C)(3) organization called American Friends of Ateret Cohanim. Seidemann said funding statistics for 2007 are not yet available, but added that the stated purpose of this U.S. tax-exempt organization is "to provide funding for a higher education institution in Israel," not to take over Palestinian homes in the Old City. End note.

WALLES